Gloria Elizabeth Chacón. *Indigenous Cosmolectics: Kab'awil and the Making of Maya and Zapotec Literatures.* University of North Carolina Press, 2018. 243 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4696-3679-5.
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The slim size of this volume belies the immense amount of research that went into its creation. Gloria E. Chacón offers a look at Maya and Zapotec literature through the lens of kab'awil, an Indigenous paradigm that takes into account both the past and the future. In spite of her detailed scholarship, Chacón writes clear prose that will enlighten the specialist and student.

Chacón approaches Indigenous literatures from her perspective as an immigrant and academic in the United States with Indigenous and campesino roots. She creates her own term to describe this study, cosmolectics, which she describes as "tying together the fundamental role that the cosmos and history, sacred writing and poetry, nature and spirituality as well as glyphs and memory play in articulating Maya and Zapotec ontologies" (12). Chacón bases her cosmolectics on kab'awil, an Indigenous concept from the early classical period. The complexity of kab'awil – portrayed variously as a preclassic Maya glyph with a smoking mirror, a postclassic god of divination, a god and then devil during Catholic conversion, and a double-headed eagle in Guatemalan textiles – serves the author well as a way of seeing that is not limited to the binary.

Borrowing the image in textiles as a god with two faces (16), kab'awil becomes Chacón's metaphor for a way to read contemporary Indigenous literature without ignoring the past. By employing kab'awil, she is able to overcome not only temporal limitations but spatial ones, since the concept spans the arbitrary boundaries of nation-states thereby linking Indigenous communities. This guiding metaphor also questions the categories of genre and gender. The authors Chacón studies blur the lines of the oral and written and criticize sexist practices while acknowledging a debt to their cultures.

In spite of the complexity of this premise, Chacón writes not to elude the reader but to be understood. She begins each chapter by explaining what she intends to show and ends with a conclusion that reiterates her insights and connects them to the following chapter. Throughout the book, the author uses kab'awil as her method as well, reading broadly across geography, time, and genre in order to present a more well-rounded view of Indigenous literature. In Chapter One, "Literacy and Power in Mesoamerica," the benefit of kab'awil hindsight demonstrates that literacy did not originate with colonization. In addition to hieroglyphs and an oral tradition, Maya and Zapotec have a long-standing alphabetic writing tradition. In other words, contemporary authors don't have to ignore or supersede previous practices but can instead connect to a rich legacy. All the while, the author forces us to rethink how we anthologize and read Latin American literature.

Chapter Two, "The Formation of the Contemporary Mesoamerican Author," reads short stories and their authors through the lens of kab'awil. Just as she argued in Chapter One that the imposition of literacy can be seen as a way to homogenize culture and reduce cultural and linguistic complexities, Chacón shows in Chapter Two how education can be used to assimilate Indigenous communities. Never willing to flatten human ingenuity, however, she acknowledges that Indigenous writers have taken advantage of literary grants and language classes without

forsaking the oral tradition or other legacies. That's because the authors in question don't necessarily see the past as disconnected from the present. This also informs Chacón's reading of how communal voices supposedly transformed into individual authors, since writing continues to serve both functions. And, she argues, it is their refusal to settle for simplistic categories that makes their writing dynamic: "They vehemently contest the entrenched historical and cultural opposition of tradition versus innovation, written versus oral expression, modern versus premodern. These issues generate significant tensions in their literary productions" (67). Chacón proves herself to be a careful reader of literature since she doesn't simplify or flatten character, plot, or description. In the process, she complicates our understanding of what constitutes Indigenous literature.

Chapter Three, "Indigenous Women, Poetry, and the Double Gaze," forms the heart of the book. Since it's the longest chapter, Chacón has the opportunity to analyze poetry in detail and also to show how these poets are living out kab'awil cosmolectics. According to intersectionality theory, women Indigenous poets could be seen as the perfect victims. They have been deprived of educational and economic autonomy while at the same time being asked to carry the burden of preserving a monolithic Indigenous image. But the kab'awil perspective turns this victimhood on its head: "Symbolically, then, women's ancestral authority trumps dominant and uninformed claims of the linguistic inferiority of Indigenous languages. The double gaze allows them to revisit the past in order to change the present" (75). For example, Maya poet Enriqueta Lunez Pérez dares to awaken God in her poem "La jti jbe' svayel kajvaltik/ Depserté a Dios." In contrast to a Christian conception which requires the intervention of a male priest, here a female poetic voice bargains with God in words and actions reminiscent of the reciprocity of Maya spirituality. Writing gives them the power to change the present without ignoring the past.

Chapter Four, "Contemporary Maya Women's Theater," explores Indigenous theatre and performance. Just as Chapter Two debunked the myth of literacy as a fruit of colonialism, Chacón shows that performance existed before plays were imported to make converts to Christianity. But she is equally concerned with how theatre as a living and spontaneous art form can operate to change harmful conditions. Like literacy education, state-sponsored theatre has been a tool to reinforce ideology. But the genre also gives playwrights and performers the freedom to contest stereotypes and develop human potential. Of the group Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya (Maya Women's Strength) or FOMMA, Chacón says: "The 'double gaze' activated in the plays allows FOMMA to engage with city and countryside, land and body, men and women, past and present" (112). While modern nation states often limit Indigenous power by attempting to relegate them to the past, the raw spontaneity of theater reveals culture and community in the present without ignoring complications and conflicts.

Chapter Five, "The Novel in Zapotec and Maya Lands," begins by examining the role of the indigenista novel and critiquing its limited way of portraying Indigenous people by looking down upon them from the outside. These novelists often had a political agenda but, while they decried exploitation of Indigenous people, they left no room for those same people to cross national or temporal boundaries. Meanwhile, emerging Zapotec and Maya novelists become agents of change via writing that refuses to buy into traditional political systems or national agendas. Yet, Chacón is not unrealistic about what literature can do to achieve its far-reaching goals: "Both novels postulate that real autonomy will have to come from Indigenous

communities and not as dictates from political and economic models of either the first or second worlds. And yet, these novels can only point to the absence of alternatives, since autonomy is still in the making" (150). Once again, a kab'awil stance allows novelists the creative flexibility to question genres and genders, tradition and innovation in ways that reflect the complexity of their lives.

Throughout the book, Chacón also educates the reader on Indigenous languages and literacy. As she points out, Indigenous writers are almost always required to be their own translators. But the process of self-translation does not occur in a clear-cut way. Some poets learned Spanish before their Indigenous language; others create simultaneously in two languages. Once again, Chacón honors the complexities of cultures and of human beings. Though she analyzes the production of various Maya and Zapotec writers in detail, she does not claim that they represent Indigenous people or even their own language group. Their individuality is also a source of power and creativity. As such, she introduces voices that have gone unnoticed in international letters and even in their own regions. While she recognizes the diversity among languages and even literature written in a given language, she does not have the space to analyze these languages in depth or even to point out the vast difference between languages in a given family, such as Valley and Isthmus Zapotec which are not mutually intelligible (although she mentions such distinctions in a note). Still, she translates all the literary selections and quotes into English herself, using her knowledge of the Maya Yukatek language and Zapotec and Maya culture to elucidate these selections.

In *Indigenous Cosmolectics*, Chacón displays a wide knowledge of what's happening in contemporary Indigenous literature, but her limited focus on several Maya and Zapotec authors allows her to examine these texts in detail and depth. I am immensely grateful for her exhaustive research and clear writing on a topic that I have only begun to explore and that should be shared with literary students and scholars on an international level. Like kab'awil, the story of this book looks both backward and forward, and ends where it began, questioning how literature and politics at once restrict Indigenous writing and allow it to grow.

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